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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002703

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY ALLIANCE FRAGILE AMIDST KURD-SHI'A
TENSIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 107 (FLEDGLING "NATIONAL PROJECT")

Classified By: POLMINCOUNS ROBERT S. FORD. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: While bitter feelings linger toward the Kurds over the election law/Kirkuk impasse, mainstream Shi'a political leaders (particularly ISCI) appear to recognize that their political self-interest requires a continuation of their alliance with the Kurds. Kurdish interlocutors have voiced a deepening distrust of Prime Minister Maliki) particularly after threats to confront Peshmerga detachments in Diyala and Kirkuk - but maintain a willingness to overcome these differences through dialogue. The axis between the Shia Islamists and the Kurds that has dominated politics here since 2004 has clearly suffered, but cooler heads understand that) at least in the short-term) their political self-interest requires them to maintain their parliamentary alliance. Given this fragility, to maintain the Shia-Kurdish axis over the medium term it is critical that both sides avoid escalating actions and rhetoric, and prepare to make meaningful compromises in the interest of political accommodation. This is especially difficult when the Kurds on one side and increasingly the Shia Dawa on the other have a zero-sum mindset on such final-status issues as Kirkuk, the oil law and disputed internal boundaries. END SUMMARY.

Shi'a Views: Marriage of Interests On the Rocks?

12. (C) On August 19 Haitham Hussein, senior advisor to ailing ISCI/Badr leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, acknowledged to Poloff lingering tensions and negative feelings toward the Kurds after the Kirkuk/election law imbroglio. However, he downplayed divisions in the Kurd/ISCI/Dawa ruling alliance, noting that the parties realize they need one another. Haitham minimized the controversy over the 34th Peshmerga unit in Diyala, saying that such cases have come up before and have always been resolved peacefully. Prime Minister Maliki's political advisor, Sadiq Rikabi, told us August 21 that there is no immediate crisis with the Kurds. The controversy over the Kurdish brigade in Diyala was settled, but neither does the Prime Minister want to grant the Kurds any special favors. Maliki wants to work with the Kurds, he concluded, but the Kurds must be reasonable.

13. (C) These assessments of self-interest contrasted with a more emotional stance taken by some Dawa contacts. Speaking by telephone to Poloff from Iran, Dawa Council of Representatives (CoR) bloc leader Ali Al-Adib tersely commented that the election law impasse left him convinced that the Kurds must change their rigid ways and accept compromise. Adib's office manager previously told us that his boss was so irate and disgusted over Kurdish inflexibility and selfishness that he stormed out of a late-July negotiating session with the Kurds and abruptly departed Baghdad to Tehran nearly a week before the CoR adjourned.

14. (C) Sheikh Abdul Halim al-Zuhairi, Dawa Party executive council member and Prime Minister Maliki's spiritual advisor,

also complained of Kurdish intransigence. Shouting over the telephone to Poloff from Najaf, the semi-cantankerous Sheikh railed about unilateral KRG oil/gas deals with foreign companies, a topic that is frequently cited by non-Kurd CoR members as a point that sticks in the collective Iraqi Arab craw. (Comment: he got even more emotional talking about his badge, however. End Comment.)

Kurds Worry over Maliki Confidence and Hard Line Approach

¶5. (C) On August 19 KRG representative to Baghdad Dilshad Miran (KDP) told us that the KRG was not concerned over possible conflict involving the 34th Brigade in Diyala. Miran, like ISCI's Husseini and Maliki aide Rikabi, thought the controversy settled. However, he said the Kurds are worried about Maliki's newfound confidence and hard-line approach, whether it derives from Iranian or Turkish encouragement or a misreading of U.S. policy.

¶6. (C) Miran cited Maliki's alleged statement that Kurdish police, security and military must depart Kirkuk by September 5 or the Iraqi Army will make them do so. The Kurds are worried that the 34th Brigade controversy and the Kirkuk threat are signals that Maliki intends to force all Kurdish security elements in Mosul and Erbil to move north of the pre-2003 Green Line.

¶7. (C) On the election law, Miran claimed Iranians had interfered, and that the Turks had paid USD 7 million to Parliamentarians to get 124 votes July 22. He said the Kurds are re-evaluating the four-sided alliance and the value of

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Tariq al-Hashimi's word. However, Miran opined that, in the end, the Sunnis need to work with the Kurds.

Kurds Willing to Talk

¶8. (C) Despite the strains, Miran noted that the KRG would send a delegation (Kosrat Rasul Ali, Fazel Mirani and (Dep FM) Omar Fatah) to Baghdad to discuss a range of issues with Maliki, including the hydrocarbons law, Article 140, the Peshmerga, the 17 percent Iraqi budget allocation for the KRG, and Ministry of Oil accounting. Through this delegation, stressed Miran, the Kurds are signaling their willingness to talk. Miran noted that the Kurds are approaching these talks cautiously, however, to gauge whether Maliki is serious about wanting to solve these problems through dialogue.

PUK Minister Denies Shi'a) Kurd Tensions

¶9. (C) In contrast to Miran's cautious approach regarding Maliki, on August 20 Minister of Water Resources Abdul-Latif Rashid (PUK) denied to us that there are serious tensions in Kurd-Shi'a relations. Rashid stated that the sides simply have different points of view, noting that he and other Kurds see and talk every day with fellow Shi'a officials/politicians.

¶10. (C) Rashid praised Maliki, stating that the PM was generally engaged and was the best of the recent prime ministers, including Jaafari and Alawi. Despite Maliki's lack of administrative or legislative experience, Rashid said he is sincere and honest; he consults with his cabinet, and bases his decisions on cabinet consultations. That said, Rashid commented that Maliki relies too much on advisers (who represent a narrow, Dawa-oriented political base), and some have given him bad advice. Rashid added that Maliki consults effectively with President Talabani and Vice Presidents Hashim and Mehdi. The weakness of the Maliki government, Rashid said, is the weakness of certain ministers.

Comment and Look Ahead

¶11. (C) We note that Abdul Latif Rashid's upbeat assessment of Maliki and Shia-Kurdish relations contrasts starkly with not only that of KRG representative in Baghdad Miran, but also Kurdish officials like Foreign Minister Zebari and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh. Zebari, for example, was adamant with us on August 20 evening that Maliki appeared to be preparing to challenge the Kurds hard on issues like Kirkuk and the budget, and that the Kurds would respond hard.

The positive atmosphere of political unity brought about by successful GOI security operations against Sadrists in Basrah and Sadr City appears to have devolved into an air of mistrust following the Kirkuk/election law impasse, and amidst recent tensions in Diyala. The current atmosphere is similar to that of late 2007/early 2008, when the Kurds sent Maliki a letter warning him not to take for granted their support for his government. A major difference, however, is Maliki's high and probably inflated opinion of his current public support and political strength. In addition, we sense an increased antipathy among Iraqi Shia Arabs toward perceived Kurdish overreach and the perceived Kurdish independence agenda.

¶12. (C) The CoR Kirkuk debate represented the first time in well over a year that Iraq's multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian political class has grappled seriously with 'final status'-like issues that are central to meaningful reconciliation: the debate revealed the intense suspicion and emotion that surrounds such issues as Kirkuk and the division of oil wealth. It also revealed the difficulties in moving the parties beyond a zero-sum mindset on these matters. END COMMENT.
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